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ABSTRACT

The School of Education at the University of Louisville (Kentucky) prepares its elementary teachers to work in an urban setting through a teacher education program that makes extensive use of field experiences. The program is organized into four phases. Phase I is the screening process for acceptance into the teacher education program for those who have completed or are completing 60 semester hours of undergraduate work. Abilities in reading, writing, and computation are tested, and the students' speech and hearing tests, grade point average, standardized test scores, and references are required. Certain course requirements must also be met to gain admittance into the program. The components of Phase II consist of courses emphasizing educational theory and supervised field work in urban school classrooms. When all course and competency requirements for Phases I and II are satisfied, the student can apply for admission into the school of education and, if accepted, may enroll in Phase III. This phase is a continuation and expansion of Phase II, comprising of courses, teaching experience, and performance evaluations. Phase IV is the student teaching experience. Again, formal application is required, and the student must submit to an interview and have a 2.5 grade point average. During this final phase, the students are in the field for a full 16 week semester in urban elementary schools. The program's success is indicated by the number of graduates hired and by the results of external program evaluations. (FG)

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A FIELD-BASED ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM THAT REALLY WORKS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to describe a field-based teacher education program and to explain why it works and what is unique about it.

The University of Louisville is an urban institution and thus the School of Education is preparing teachers for service in an urban setting. The student body in elementary education is composed primarily of young women (though there are more male students at present than ever before) who are graduates of the area secondary schools. Most students, for one reason or another, remain in the area after graduation. In essence then, the School of Education is preparing teachers primarily for the Louisville metropolitan area.

The School of Education is a senior college; that is, students must have junior status (completed 60 s.h. of general education requirements) before they can make application to or be accepted in the School of Education. However, application for admission to teacher education is generally filed during the sophomore year of a student's undergraduate program. Although the University of Louisville is an open-admissions institution, acceptance to the University does not guarantee acceptence in teacher education or acceptance in the School of Education. The program is organized into four phases. The remainder of this paper will focus on these four phases.

SCREENING (ADMISSION TO TEACHER EDUCATION)

Phase I is the point in the program where extensive screening procedures for the purpose of screening students into teacher education have been implemented. Each step in the screening procedure has been designed to assess competencies deemed necessary for success as a teacher. Concurrently with the screening, students are engaged in the completion of a minimum of 60 semester hours of general education requirements which with one or two exceptions are the same for all University students.

Reading. Reading skills are evaluated through use of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. Performance at the twelfth-grade is the required minimum. Students who are below that minimum must complete a remedial reading course or be tutored in order to raise their performance to the minimum. The reading test may be re-taken once. If a student fails to attain the minimum level of performance on the repeat, he or she is excluded from the program.

Courses for certification in the School of Education are closed; that is, students may enroll in them only if they have been accepted into teacher education and the School of Education.

Writing. All students must demonstrate proficiency in writing skills. This proficiency can be demonstrated in two ways: the student may enroll in English 102 (Composition) and complete that course with a grade of "B" or "A", or the student may take a writing test.

The writing test requires the student to respond, blue-book style, to one of a series of questions/situations that future teachers will face. The purpose of the screening is precision and skill in written expression. Writing samples are evaluated by a faculty committee with each member reading the exams independently of the others. The holistic approach using the ETS Model, of evaluation is employed.

If a student fails to perform at the minimum required level, he or she may re-take the test once. Failure to attain the minimum level on the re-take will result in exclusion from the program. If a student has failed the writing test twice and takes English 102 and earns only a "C", he or she may repeat English 102. However, failure to earn a "B" or an "A" in the repeat of the course will result in exclusion from the program.

Computation. It was the opinion of the faculty that prospective teachers ought to be able to function in math computation at a minimum of twelfth-grade level. Therefore a 48-item test was developed and administered to 100 students in an urban high school with a culturally, economically, and socially diverse student body. Because only three years of math is required for a high school diploma in Kentucky, and those students in twelfth-grade math courses would be superior students and thus skew the results, a sample of 100 students was drawn at random from twelfth-grade English classes (four years of English is required for graduation from a Kentucky high school). The mean score in computation for the sample of 100 was 27.62.

Because of the small number of subjects a second administration of the test took place at a suburban/rural high school. All twelfth-grade students took the test (N = 300), and the mean in this instance was 25.41. The reliability of the test was calculated each time it was administered to students (both high school and University students). The K - R coefficient of reliability is .96; the K - R range is .92 to .98.

The minimum for the math computation was set at 28 correct items. Analysis of the data since the implementation of the computation requirement indicates that for students in teacher education, the mean score is 35.46.

Students who fail to make the minimum score may re-take the test once or complete a basic math course with a grade of "B" or "A". Failure to comply will result in exclusion from the program.

Speech and Hearing. Prior to admission to teacher education all students must submit a report of a recent physical examination by a physician of their choice. The physical must include a speech and hearing screening. Students are required to comply with any recommendations made by the physician regarding speech and hearing problems or they risk exclusion from the program.

All teacher education students are required also to complete a course in speech as a part of their general education requirements. This course is the responsibility of the Department of Theater, Arts and Speech in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Grade Point Average. The minimum grade point average for admission to teacher education is 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.

ACT Scores. Students are required to present ACT scores as a part of their entrance procedure to teacher education. The mean ACT score for the University of Louisville students in teacher education is 22. (The national ACT mean is 18; the ACT mean in Arts and Sciences students at the University of Louisville is 19.5.)

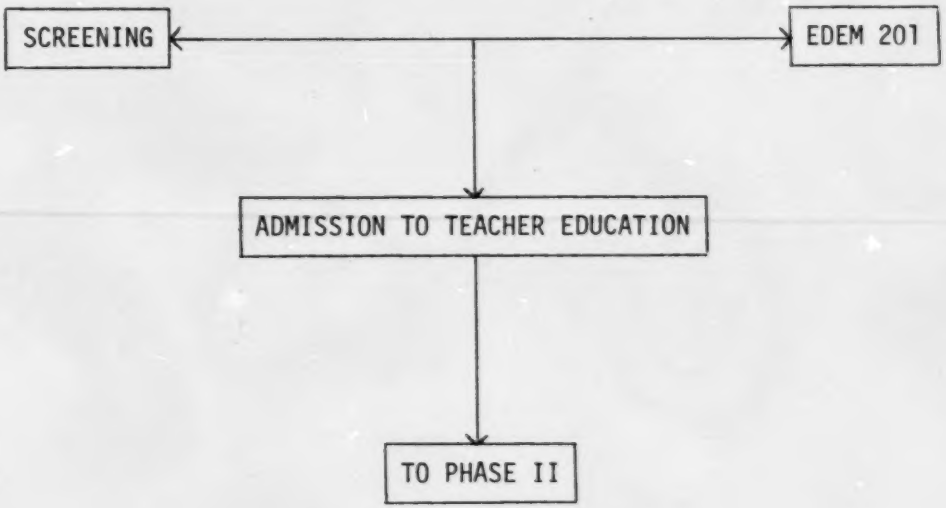
References. A favorable recommendation from a member of the community, and a favorable recommendation from the instructor in EDEM 201 is necessary.

Course Requirements. Before admission to teacher education is granted, the student must complete English 101, 102, TAS 111, and EDEM 201, which is taken concurrently with Phase I.

EDEM 201, Introduction to Education. This is a "hand/eyes on" course. It provides the student with a variety of experiences in various educational

FIGURE 1

Organization of Phase I



settings. The purpose of the course is to enable the student to take a broad, albeit limited in-depth due to time restrictions, look at the field in order to arrive at career decisions and exercise options.

The culmination of Phase I is admission to teacher education (Figure 1). Data include that students who have reached this point in the program will be successful in completing the remaining phases at a high level.

Insert Figure 1 about here

PHASE II

Phase II is divided into two major components: theory and practice. Students must formally apply for this phase and be interviewed by a member of the Phase II team.

Theory. Students in Phase II are enrolled in three courses focusing upon the teaching of math, language arts, and children's literature. In addition they are enrolled in two supportive courses -- one in human growth and development and the other a foundations of elementary education course. The purpose of the pedagogical courses is to prepare the student in the use of materials and teaching strategies, to develop planning management and evaluation techniques in specific subjects/disciplines.

Course content includes topics such as human interaction and cultural diversity, and mainstreaming considerations in teaching.

The so-called "methods" classes (though they are far more than methods courses) meet on the campus two days a week for periods of one and one-half hours. These courses are instructed by members of the Department of Early and Middle Childhood Education.

Practice. Two days a week students are in the field working as teacher associates. That is, they work with a designated classroom teacher in a

public/non-public school classroom in assisting in the planning of lessons, teaching mini-lessons, and assisting in the evaluation of the result of the lessons. Their performance is supervised and evaluated by the supervising teacher and by the University supervisor who will make periodic visits. Students return to the campus the following day to discuss and evaluate what has occurred the previous day. The following day they are back in the field.

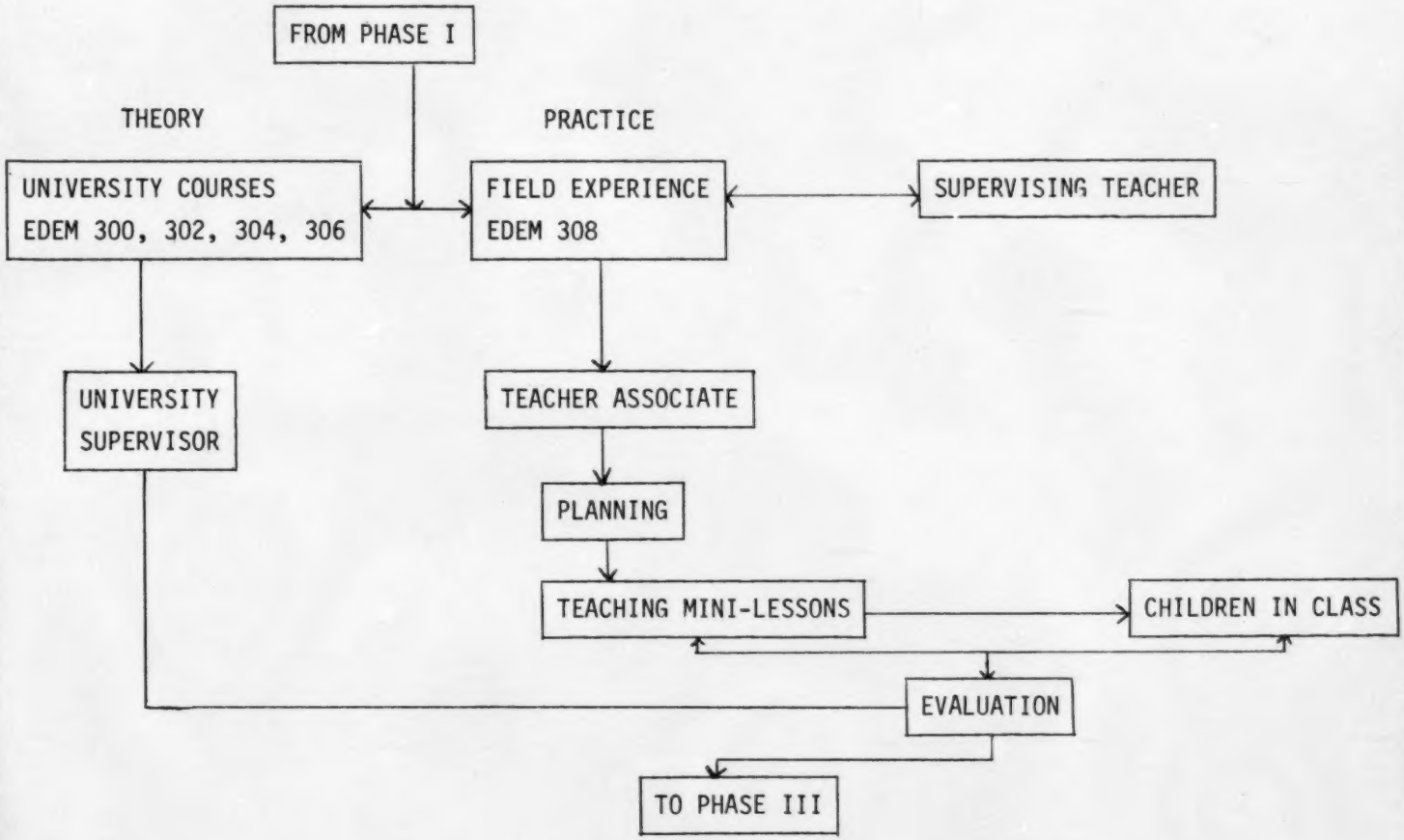
Discussion. Our integrated approach has been very successful. Students are closely supervised and supported by individuals with distinct perspectives--the classroom teacher representing the practical day-to-day perspective; the University supervisor representing a more theoretical perspective. The performance of each student is evaluated by both supervisors with the final grade for field experience assigned as a result of this joint effort. All evaluations are written and discussed with the student. The concern in the evaluation is providing the needs of students through joint planning.

Following completion of this phase, the completion of 60 hours, including Phase II, the course in human growth and development, and a grade point average of 2.25 overall and 2.5 in professional education courses, the student can apply for admission to the School of Education. When accepted, the student may enroll in Phase III. Figure 2 shows the organization and flow of Phase II.

Insert Figure 2 about here

FIGURE 2

Organization of Phase II



PHASE III

Phase III is a continuation, but an expansion of Phase II. Rather than compartmentalize the phases, Phase III is a carry-over of Phase II, building on what has been learned. In Phase III the areas not covered directly in Phase II form the basis of the "theory component".

Theory. Phase III courses cover the areas of reading, social studies, and science. The course content follows the same pattern as in Phase II, focusing of course on the specific subject disciplines of reading, social studies and science.

Practice. As in Phase II, students in Phase III are in the field two days a week to implement, discuss, and evaluate that which has been presented in the course work. While the focus in this phase in on reading, social studies, and science, the students' role as teacher associate is expanded as he/she is expected to continue to refine the skills in the areas emphasized in Phase II, while planning and teaching mini-lessons in new areas.

Evaluation. Again, the procedure is the same; however the University supervisor is different as is the classroom teaching supervisor. All evaluations are the joint effort of the classroom supervisor and the University supervisor and all evaluations are written and discussed with the student. The organization of Phase III is illustrated in Figure 3.

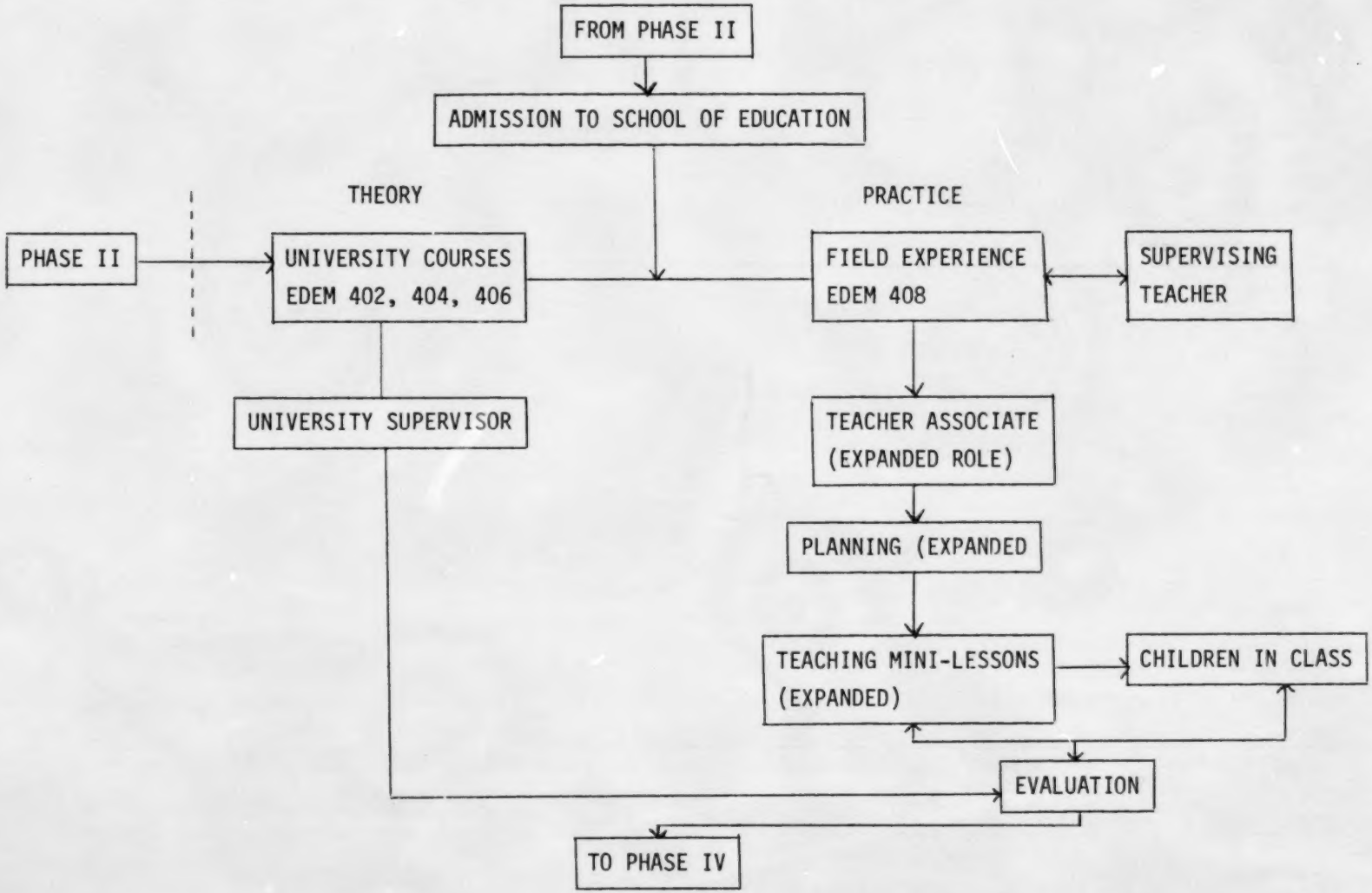
Insert Figure 3 about here

PHASE IV

Phase IV is the student (practice, cadet) teaching experience which is culmination of the program. As in the other phases of the program, students must make formal application to this phase and must have a 2.5 grade

FIGURE 3

Organization of Phase III



point average in Phases II and III, and must be interviewed in addition to completing the application form.

Student teachers begin their experience in the autumn with the public/non-public school to which they are assigned. That is, they observe both the field placement school schedule and the University's. The same holds true for students starting their student teaching experience during the spring semester. They begin their experience when the public/non-public schools return from Christmas vacation. Student teachers are in the field for the complete teaching day, five days a week, for 16 weeks -- a full semester. They are expected to perform all teaching duties consistent with the policy of the field school. Two of the sixteen weeks our student teachers take complete control of the classroom. They are supervised of course by the supervising classroom teacher and a University supervisor who will visit a minimum of three times to observe and evaluate.

One day a week, after the completion of the student teaching day, the students in Phase IV attend a practicum seminar. During this time they discuss and attempt to resolve problems encountered in the student teaching experience.

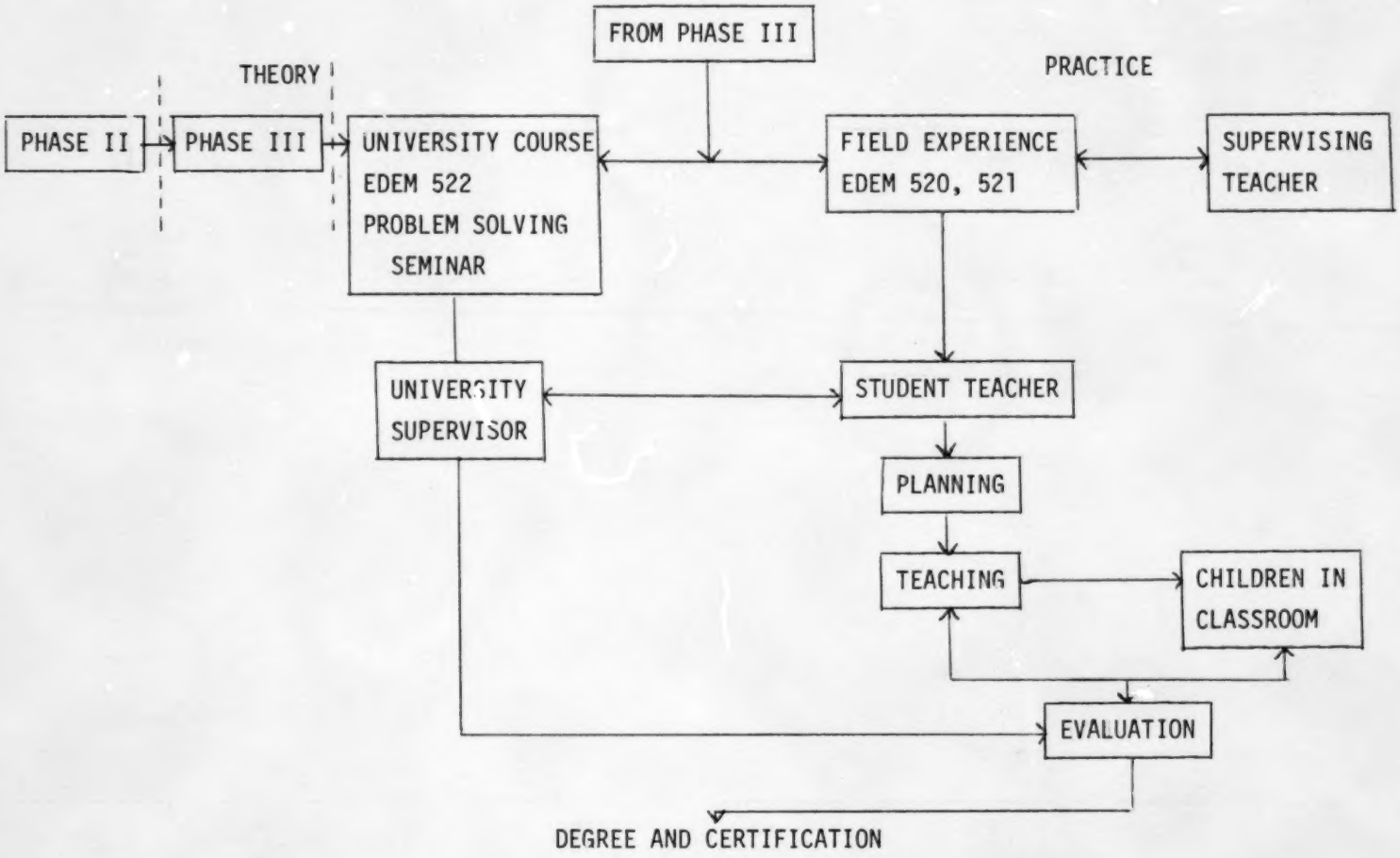
Evaluation of the student teaching experience is based on the results of the minimum of three visits by the University supervisor and the rating of the classroom supervising teacher. All evaluations are written and discussed with the student.

The organization of Phase IV is illustrated in Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 about here

FIGURE 4

Organization of Phase IV



UNIQUENESS AND SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

The program is unique in a number of ways. First, from the time students enter teacher education, they are involved with working with children. Therefore, each phase of the program is based on the development of theory and application of that theory in the real world -- the elementary classroom. Second, all theory-based courses contain components emphasizing classroom management, evaluation theory, human interaction and mainstreaming. Third, because the school is an urban School of Education, students work constantly in multi-cultural settings. Their knowledge of the problems of urban school systems is not a textbook knowledge, but a knowledge resulting from experience in those situations which are described and discussed in their textbooks. Fourth, through careful planning and the establishment of site schools, students benefit and learn from a variety of experiences. Phase II students for example may be assigned to a grade in an urban school, but would move to another grade in another situation, say a suburban school for the Phase III experience. The same placement pattern is continued in Phase IV. As a result of their diverse experience in preparation, students perform well and are successful regardless of the grade level assignment of their first experience. Fifth, because of the use of site schools, mutual benefits have resulted. University faculty have aided the site schools in program planning and development and likewise the University's program is stronger due to vital input from practicing teachers. Sixth, the program is unique because the model is based on input from a number of individuals, the cooperating teacher (the classroom supervising teacher), the University faculty and

students who have completed the program. As a result, the program is constantly being refined and, at present, is a highly sophisticated program with solid results. Seventh, the program is unique because of the extensive and sophisticated screening procedures. The State Department of Education in Kentucky is on the threshold of mandating a set of screening procedures and establishing minimum standards for prospective teachers in basic communication and computation skills. What the state is about to require, the School of Education and the Department of Early and Middle Childhood Education have been doing for over eight years.

Finally, there is evidence which will attest to the success of the program.

Graduates of the program are consistently among the first new teachers hired by school districts in metropolitan Louisville. If hiring rates are an indicator of success, and in these days of so-called teacher surpluses, they certainly must be considered as such, then the program is indeed a success. It is rare when a graduate of the program wants to teach and is unable to find a job or is not hired immediately. Another indication of the success of this program can be found in the reports of recent NCATE and state accreditation evaluations. In both reports the elementary preparation program was noted as outstanding.

It is said that Rome was not built in a day; neither was this program. It has taken a number of years and efforts of a number of individuals. Faculty, students, staff, administration, public and non-public school personnel are responsible for the success and uniqueness of this program. Whatever praise the program receives belongs to them.